After releasing a string of plays that failed to achieve critical or popular acclaim, Williams returned on the scene with *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, a southern gothic drama that depicted a family in crisis and that resurrected Williams's preoccupation with interpersonal relationships, truth, and questions of existence. The play possessed many of the qualities of Williams's earlier (and most successful) work. It began as a short story entitled "Three Players of a Summer Game" and was published in *The New Yorker* in 1952. After being subjected to Williams's typical process of revision and restructuring, it was released in 1955 as a dramatic work. The play, which won a Pulitzer Prize that same year, marked a return to realism, depicting gritty issues such as alcoholism, failed romance, homosexuality, and social conduct in the South with a straightforward approach devoid of fantasy and structural tricks. The play allowed Williams to rekindle his working relationship with director Elia Kazan, who directed the initial Broadway run of the play. Audiences responded favorably. Like many of Williams's works, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* was later adapted for film. Of all of the film adaptations of the play, it was the 1958 film directed by Richard Brooks that had the most success, rivaling the popularity of Elia Kazan's 1951 film adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The film, which cast Burl Ives as Big Daddy, Elizabeth Taylor as Maggie Pollitt, and Paul Newman as Brick Pollitt, was hugely successful, earning its main actors Academy Award nominations and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* a place in popular culture.

In addition to its ability to serve as popular entertainment, the play had great social significance. It continued to address historical and cultural concerns that had revealed themselves to Williams in the course of his own life. In the play's allegorical reference to the death of the Old South via the imminent death of Big Daddy and the decomposition of the Southern family, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* returned to themes found in Williams's early works such as *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, continuing a social conversation that extended beyond the realm of popular entertainment. The play also adopted other weighty themes that Williams chose to reveal primarily by way of the exchanges that took place between characters. In this way, the play presented a series of psychological portraits, which provided Williams with a format to pose philosophical questions about existence, truth, and self-knowledge.

In writing about *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, there are several ways to approach the most significant aspects of the play, noted above. First, you might choose to analyze the central actions of the play and explain their significance by performing close readings of the text. Second, you might look at one of the more understated and overlooked aspects of the play—the set—to consider how this element works in line with the thematic concerns of the play, giving weight to the information that is revealed to us through the characters. Third, you might choose to focus on the ending of the play, a variable conclusion that Williams revised several times throughout his career. Of course these are only a few of the options that are available to you, but any one of these options will work well, giving you room to consider the themes of the play and the play's ultimate significance through an evaluation of the formal elements of the work.

If you choose the first option—analyzing the central actions of the play and explaining their significance by performing close readings of the text—you will need to begin by examining the form of the play. The play is broken down into three acts that each have a central action. By analyzing each of these acts and the actions that are central to each, you can begin to identify important themes of the play. This will help you to choose a topic, prepare a thesis, and begin gathering evidence to support your claims. In the first act, for example, an introductory reading will reveal that the major action lies in the interaction between Maggie Pollitt and her husband Brick. In fact, their interaction fills most of the first act, accented only by brief interruptions from Mae, Big Mama, and Dixie. By examining passages that relate to the interaction of Brick and Maggie, we can begin to gain an understanding of their relationship and the dramatic tension of the play. Consider, for example, the following exchange:

**MARGARET.** … Why are you looking at me like that?

**BRICK** *(whistling softly, now)*. Like what, Maggie?

**MARGARET** *(intensely, fearfully)*. The way y' were lookin' at me just now, befo' I caught your eye in the mirror and you started to whistle! I don't know how to describe it but it froze my blood!—I've caught you...
lookin' at me like that so often lately. What are you thinkin' of when you look at me like that?

BRICK. I wasn't conscious of lookin' at you, Maggie.

MARGARET. Well, I was conscious of it! What were you thinkin'?

BRICK. I don't remember thinking of anything, Maggie.

MARGARET. Don't you think I know that—? Don't you—?—Think I know that—?

BRICK (coolly). Know what, Maggie?

MARGARET (struggling for expression). That I've gone through this—hideous!—transformation, become—hard! Frantic! … Of course, you always had that detached quality as if you were playing a game without much concern over whether you won or lost, and now that you've lost the game, not lost but just quit playing, you have that rare sort of charm that usually only happens in very old or hopelessly sick people, the charm of the defeated…. [O]ne thing I don't have is the charm of the defeated, my hat is still in the ring, and I am determined to win!

(There is the sound of croquet mallets hitting croquet balls.)

— What is the victory of a cat on a hot tin roof?—I wish I knew…. Just staying on it, I guess, as long as she can…. (890–93)

The passage presents countless possible topics for your essay—an analysis of one of the characters, an examination of the title metaphor, or some exposition on the thematic concerns of the play and their significance, to name only a few. This single passage not only reveals Maggie's and Brick's true characters—Maggie as a frustrated wife who has become "hard" and "[f]rantic" (890), and Brick as a detached man with "the charm of the defeated" (892); it also reveals several themes of the play— isolation, failed relationships, and mendacity. The passage also references the title of the work, and an entire essay could be formed around an examination of this metaphor. Any of these topics could form the basis of a thesis that can then be supported by performing close readings of other sections of the text that deal with these same topics.

The same tactic can be applied with each act. Consider, for instance, the second act, which takes as its central action a strained dialogue between Brick and Big Daddy. Like the passage cited previously, the exchange between Brick and Big Daddy that fills the second act also presents the option of analyzing characters, examining the title metaphor, or writing about the thematic concerns of the play and their significance. A passage from the second act might serve as your starting point, or the information it yields could be combined with your observations about the previous citation from act 1 to begin building the argument of your essay. For instance, if you choose to analyze a character or compare and contrast characters in the play, the dialogue reveals much about Brick and Big Daddy and their relationship. It seems to expose the best and worst features of each character—the honesty and sincerity that both are capable of but also their inability to communicate and to truly connect with those who love them and their failure to refrain from that which disgusts them. Therefore, you could use this part of the passage to begin an essay analyzing Brick or Big Daddy or comparing and contrasting the two. In this case, you would continue on by evaluating other places in the text where Brick and Big Daddy make an appearance.

If you choose to evaluate the title metaphor of the play, you would consider its appearance in the following passage:

BIG DADDY. That woman of yours has a better shape on her than Gooper's but somehow or other they got the same look about them.

BRICK. What sort of look is that, Big Daddy?

BIG DADDY. I don't know how to describe it, but it's the same look.

BRICK. They don't look peaceful, do they?

BIG DADDY. No, they sure in hell don't.

BRICK. They look nervous as cats?
BIG DADDY. That's right, they look nervous as cats.

BRICK. Nervous as a couple of cats on a hot tin roof?

BIG DADDY. That's right, boy, they look like a couple of cats on a hot tin roof. It's funny that you and Gooper being so different would pick out the same type of woman.

BRICK. Both of us married into society, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY. Crap … I wonder what give them both that look?

BRICK. Well. They're sittin' in the middle of a big piece of land, Big Daddy, twenty-eight thousand acres is a pretty big piece of land and so they're squaring off on it, each determined to knock off a bigger piece of it than the other whenever you let it go.

BIG DADDY. I got a surprise for those women. I'm not gonna let it go for a long time yet if that's what they're waiting for. (924–25)

Consider Brick's use of the metaphor in this passage. To whom or what does this metaphor apply? What does Big Daddy contribute to this part of the conversation? Likewise, you could combine this information with your observations about the appearance of the title metaphor in the first act and go on to explore its other manifestations in the text. This passage indicates that Mae and Maggie are like cats on a hot tin roof, but other close readings may indicate that other characters can be compared in this manner as well. You would need to conclude by explaining why the title and the methods that Williams uses to convey its importance are significant.

As an alternative, if you choose to focus on the thematic concerns of the play and their significance you will want to focus on a later portion of the dialogue that builds up to a literal revelation of a central theme of the work: mendacity. Consider the following exchange between Brick and Big Daddy:

BIG DADDY. I'll make a bargain with you. You tell me why you drink and I'll hand you one. I'll pour the liquor myself and hand it to you.

BRICK. Why do I drink?

BIG DADDY. Yea! Why?…

BRICK. I'll tell you in one word.

BIG DADDY. What word?

BRICK. DISGUST!… Have you ever heard the word "mendacity"?

BIG DADDY. Sure. Mendacity is one of them five dollar words that cheap politicians throw back and forth at each other.

BRICK. You know what it means?

BIG DADDY. Don't it mean liars and lying?

BRICK. Yes, sir, liars and lying.

BIG DADDY. Has someone been lying to you? … Who's been lying to you, has Margaret been lying to you, has your wife been lying to you about something, Brick?

BRICK. Not her. That wouldn't matter.

BIG DADDY. Then who's been lying to you, and what about?

BRICK. No one single person and no one lie….
Mendacity is a theme that is verbalized by Brick in this passage, expounded upon by Big Daddy, and, further, reflected in the interactions of the characters throughout the entire course of the play. From this passage we know that both Brick and Big Daddy struggle with dishonesty in the world, but their dialogue elsewhere in act 2 reveals that both also allow it to seep into their own lives, with Brick unable to own up to the truth of his relationship with Skipper and Big Daddy lying to his wife and refusing to deal properly with the realization that he despises the woman he has lived with for most of his life. You might choose to make note of these observations and then return to the first act to consider how the interaction between Maggie and Brick also references this theme. You would continue to look for evidence of this theme throughout the play and would conclude with your thoughts on what the play is telling us about mendacity and why this is significant. These are only a few of the topics that could be utilized using this method. Consider what other information is revealed to us by considering the central action of each act and use the same methods of close reading, identification, and exposition to shape your own observations into a strong essay.

If you prefer to consider a more subtle aspect of the play, you may choose the second suggested topic—an examination of the importance of the set in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. In addition to our own observations of how the set is presented in the text, Williams provides his own "Notes for the Designer," which explain thoughts on how the set should be treated in staged versions of the play. You might begin by making note of your own observations about the set from the text and then return to Williams's notes. Consider his explanation of the physical aspects of the set such as furniture and props:

Two articles of furniture need mention: a big double bed which staging should make a functional part of the set as often as suitable, the surface of which should be slightly raked to make figures on it seen more easily; and against the wall space between the two huge double doors upstage: a monumental monstrosity peculiar to our times, a huge console combination of a radio-phonograph (Hi-Fi with three speakers) TV set and liquor cabinet … This piece of furniture (!?!), this monument, is a very complete and compact little shrine to virtually all the comforts and illusions behind which we hide from such things as the characters in the play are faced with…. (880–81)

Here Williams identifies the bed and the television/liquor cabinet as the two most important props in the play. Consider why this is and return to the text again, looking for examples of where these items appear in the play and how they function as symbols. You may also want to consider Williams's intended use of light and the implied history of the home among other symbols. Do not simply rely on Williams's own comments on these matters. Make note of what else the text itself reveals to us about the set and, consequently, what the set reveals to us about the play.

Finally, you may find that the conclusion of the play is most appealing to you. Williams actually created three different versions of the final act: the original version, a version that was revised for the Broadway debut of the play, and a third version that was drafted for a 1973 revival of the play. You may wish to compare and contrast two of the versions or all three. You can prepare for the start of your essay in much the same way that was outlined for the topics above. Perform close readings of important passages from the versions you have chosen, making note of similarities and differences. You will need to conclude by giving some insight into why these similarities and differences are important and what they reveal about the play.

### Topics and Strategies

In the sections that follow, you will find a variety of suggested topics accompanied by questions and observations to assist you in the task of writing successfully about *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Remember that this is not a comprehensive list of topics, and the statements and questions that appear after each suggested topic are merely a guide to help spark your own ideas about the work. A successful paper will present a strong thesis based upon your own original ideas and will be supported by relevant examples resulting from close readings of the text. A wide variety of interpretations will be possible.
as you consider each topic. Use the strategic questions and observations to stimulate your own thoughts about the text and to assist you in developing a strong thesis. Remember to read through the text more than once, making note of those elements of the text that support your argument. It will be equally important to make note of those elements that contradict your thesis, as this will help you to refine your argument and create a stronger case.

Themes

Although mendacity is often identified as the central theme of the play, no doubt because it is a theme that is spelled out literally for us in the dialogue, the play has many other themes for consideration. Aside from having to deal with truth and deception, the characters also struggle with isolation and loneliness. The play is also built around the characters' greedy attempts to gain control of the Pollitt plantation in light of the imminent death of Big Daddy. An exploration of any of these themes can serve as a good start for your essay. Ask yourself what Williams is saying about these topics and why these revelations are significant.

Sample Topics:

1. Mendacity: When Big Daddy asks Brick why he is an alcoholic, Brick tells him that he drinks because of disgust. He is, he says, disgusted by mendacity. What is mendacity and how is this theme treated in the play? What is the relationship of each of the characters to this theme?

   You will want to begin by considering the passage referenced above. How do the characters define mendacity? Although Brick and Big Daddy indicate that they are fed up with mendacity, are they the only characters entitled to feel this way? Consider if their own actions also indicate mendacity. In other words, are their views on mendacity hypocritical? You will need to go beyond this one passage, considering instances of mendacity in the other acts. Brick indicates that the only way to live with mendacity is to drink. Big Daddy also seems to suggest that there is no other escape from mendacity. Are they correct?

2. Isolation: Although the characters in the play are never alone, there is a distinct atmosphere of isolation throughout the play. How does Williams create this sense of isolation and why is it significant?

   As mentioned above, you should note that throughout the play as characters attempt to have private dialogues, they are often interrupted repeatedly by other members of the family. Knowing that Williams does not present the characters as literally, physically isolated, you will need to determine how he creates a sense of isolation in the play. Consider the formal elements of the text such as symbolism, for one. Also, consider the characters and their development or lack of development. What do we know about the emotional state of the main characters? How do we know that they feel isolated? What formal elements provide us with this information? Consider also what causes their isolation and why this is significant. Is Williams attempting to present some larger statement about society or about human nature?

3. Greed: Much of the play is devoted to the characters' struggle to win their share of the Pollitt inheritance. Is it fair to say that the characters are driven by greed? Or is there something else at work? Do any of the characters have better intentions?

   Consider all of the scenes that reference the characters' struggle to win their share of Big Daddy's estate. Who is interested in the estate and who is not? Can we determine anything about the motivations of the characters? For instance, we know that Mae and Maggie are desperate to inherit his estate, but why? Are they motivated by greed? You may feel that they are, or you may feel, given what we know about their current situations and their backgrounds, that they are driven by other forces. For instance, how does Maggie's background contribute to her desire to inherit the Pollitt estate?

Character

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* provides endless possibilities for writing about character. The play consists of strong characters who consistently clash, leaving little need for symbolism. The play is, ultimately, a series of portraits of individuals, relationships, and the family as a whole. You might choose to analyze a single character or compare and contrast several characters. You could also focus on the relationship between two or more characters such as Maggie and Brick or Brick...
and Big Daddy. It could also be rewarding to examine the presentation of the Pollitt family as a whole. In all cases you will want to consider everything we know about the characters. Consider what drives each of the characters to act as they do. How do they react to each other? How self-aware are the characters? Make note of how the characters change—or fail to change—throughout the play.

Sample Topics:

1. Maggie the Cat: How does Williams want readers and audiences to respond to Maggie the Cat?

Your answer to this question may vary depending upon which version of the play you choose to address, or you might choose to center your issue on an examination of the various versions of the play and how Maggie is presented in each. Consider how Maggie is presented to us. What do we know about her history as well as her current predicament? Does Williams's treatment of this character elicit sympathy? Can she be categorized as a strong character or is she really a weak character? Either view may be supported using examples from the text.

2. Brick: Analyze this character.

Begin by considering all of Brick's attributes. His name suggests strength and solidity, but is this in line with his character? We also know that Brick was a football hero. He is also depicted as the favorite son of Big Daddy and Big Mama. How is this portrait contradicted by his true state? What is the symbolic significance of Brick's crutch?

3. Big Daddy: Analyze this character.

Although Big Daddy may be characterized as a simple, coarse character, the dialogue of the play reveals that he is a very complex person. Consider how Big Daddy is presented in the play. How does this image change when he appears in act 2 with Brick? What do we learn about him, his emotions, his views on existence from these passages?

History and Context

Like *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* references a specific time in American history, when the ways associated with plantation life were being lost amid industrialism and urbanization. Consider how the play addresses this theme. Specifically, you may want to consider how Big Daddy functions as a symbol of plantation life. On the other hand, you may also want to consider how the other characters represent the new industrialized society. Is their greed symptomatic of a modern society?

Sample Topic:

1. The death of the Old South: Like Williams's early works, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* seems to point to the death of the Old South, although this concept is never revealed literally. What methods does Williams employ in order to address this theme?

In order to address this topic, you will want to consider not only literal references to the Old South such as the set, which is a plantation in the South, but also the interaction between the characters in the play. How, for instance, does the decay of the Pollitt family serve as a symbol of the decay of the Old South? You may also want to focus on Big Daddy. The other characters note that he is the biggest planter in the South, but the play also reminds us that he is not infallible. Like all others, he also must face death. Consider also what role the other characters have in this metaphor. Are they perhaps representative of something that is replacing the ways of the Old South? Does the play suggest that industrialism is the cause of the decay and death of the Old South, or does it suggest rather that immorality and greed are the primary culprits? Are these simply symptoms of modern society, or are we able to separate the two? It may be helpful to compare Williams's treatment of the death of the Old South in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* to the treatment of the death of the Old South in *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Alternatively, you could compare the treatment
of the death of the Old South in other works of literature, such as William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily."

**Philosophy and Ideas**

Death is presented as a major theme in the play as is self-knowledge, or the denial of self. The play also addresses questions of existence, truth and illusion, and our options for living with disappointment and difficulty. The question seems to be: What comes of our confrontation with topics of mortality and existence? Consider what view or views the play presents on these matters.

**Sample Topic:**

1. **Death and self-knowledge:** Does the play present the view that a confrontation with mortality generates self-knowledge or self-awareness? If so, is this presented as a positive effect or is it rather something that we are plagued with?

Consider the scenes in the play that reference death or mortality. Which of the characters seem to struggle with this issue? Of course we know that Big Daddy has to face his mortality, but how does Skipper's death affect Brick? Do the characters seem to come to a greater understanding of themselves through a consideration of death? Is this necessarily a good thing? To go beyond a typical treatment of this topic, you may wish to also consider how the play references symbolic deaths. For instance, consider how the death of the relationship of Maggie and Brick affects Maggie. What about instances in the play that reference the death of a dream? Consider Maggie's and Brick's remarks on this subject.

**Form and Genre**

Like many of Williams's plays, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is a family drama. All of the action of the play pivots on the interaction among the family members and the family's reaction to the terminal illness of the patriarch, Big Daddy. This genre, which has its roots in classical drama, became popular in American theater during this time period. Consider why the family would have been a topic important enough to drive an entire genre of literature. You will want to consider how the American family could be categorized and how the idea of the family was shifting during this time. An examination of genre will therefore allow you to work from a historical or contextual standpoint or a philosophical one.

If you decide to address the form of the play, you will want to begin by considering its structure. The play is broken down into three acts, and each act has a central action. These actions—dialogues, primarily—are easily identified because they dominate the act and are only briefly interrupted by other characters. You may choose to consider the major actions of each act, looking for key themes or elements that stand out. The third act may present more of a challenge because it has been variable, with Williams revising the ending twice. This variable should not be viewed as a problem. In fact, it could become the topic for your essay.

**Sample Topics:**

1. **Multiple endings:** Williams composed several different endings for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Which ending do you feel is most successful? Explain why.

Williams created several different endings to the play. Two versions, the original ending and the ending created for Elia Kazan's film, are included in the Library of America printing of the play that we are using in this book. In addition to these two versions, there is also one other ending that Williams drafted later. Compare two or more of these endings. What do they share in common and what elements did Williams change? How do these changes affect our understanding the play? For instance, does the reappearance of Big Daddy significantly impact the way we perceive the play? Do the endings change our response to the individual characters? Conclude by explaining which version you feel is most successful and why.

2. **Family drama:** Analyze the play as a work of family drama.
The play presents the breakdown of a southern family. Consider what themes Williams is able to address by working in this format. Is the breakdown of the family symbolic in any way? What do we learn from the interaction between the characters? What causes the conflicts that drive the family apart? In addition to considering the Pollitt family as a whole, you may wish to examine the other families that comprise it—Gooper, Mae, and the children; Brick and Maggie; or Big Mama and Big Daddy. You might also choose to compare the Pollitt family to another family in literature or in American theater, such as the Tyrone family in Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* or the Loman family of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. What message do the plays give us about the state of the modern family? If you choose to compare the play to *Death of a Salesman*, you will also want to consider how the play presents the image of the patriarch. What message does the play share with *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and why is this significant?

**Language, Symbols, and Imagery**

The most prominent symbol of the play is, of course, the metaphor of the cat on a hot tin roof, which Williams uses for the title of the play. It is referenced throughout the play, noted in the interactions and private commentaries of Brick, Big Daddy, and Maggie. Not all of Williams's symbols are this overt, but close readings of the text will reveal that there are countless other examples of symbolism that you might use to begin your essay. Consider, for example, Brick's crutch. How does the crutch function as a symbol of his true self? In addition to making his physical shortcomings apparent, what does it indicate about his mental or emotional well-being? Consider the scenes that reference his crutch. How do these scenes impact our interpretation of Brick? Does the crutch make us more sympathetic to his character, or does it simply reinforce what we already know about Brick?

**Sample Topics:**

1. **The title:** Why do you feel that Williams named the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*? Does the title accurately reflect the major concerns of the work?

   Begin by considering the title outside of a reading of the text. In other words, note what you think of when you read this title. What images come to mind? Refer back to the text and make note of all passages that address the idea of a cat on a hot tin roof. For instance, Maggie and Brick often refer to this idea, and later in the play, Brick and Big Daddy discuss this notion as well. Although Maggie identifies herself as the cat and Brick and Daddy liken Maggie and Mae to cats on a hot tin roof, does this metaphor apply to only these two characters or does it also refer to the condition of other characters in the play? Consider how this metaphor reinforces the thematic concerns of the play.

2. **The imminent death of Big Daddy:** The play centers on the looming death of Big Daddy. What symbolic value does this imminent death hold? And what themes is Williams able to address by suggesting the imminent death of Big Daddy as a metaphor?

   Consider what information we are presented with regarding the imminent death of Big Daddy. You will need to ask yourself who Big Daddy is and what he represents. Then consider how his death might be symbolic. In addition to revealing social or cultural themes, how does his looming death allow Williams to present philosophical concerns?

3. **The set:** Preceding the play, Williams provides detailed notes regarding the proper design of the set. Analyze the set of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and explain what significance these details have.

   Consider Williams's "Notes for the Designer" and consider his instructions regarding the set. How do props such as the bed and the television/liquor cabinet create a sense of the thematic concerns of the play? What about the features of the plantation, the house, and the huge double doors? What significance does the lighting have? You will need to return to the text and look at where these parts of the set are apparent and what effect they have on us as readers.

**Compare and Contrast Essays**
If you choose to write a compare and contrast essay, you will find that the play presents many unlikely topics for comparison. For example, a comparison of Big Daddy and Brick may reveal that the characters are more alike than it first appears. The same is true of the female characters of the play who seem to constantly clash but who have much in common. Whether you treat characters, themes, or other formal elements, consider how information is revealed from elements that seem to be in opposition.

Sample Topics:

1. **Big Daddy and Brick**: Compare and contrast these characters.

   Although Big Daddy and Brick appear to be very different characters at first glance, there is much they share in common as well. Consider descriptions of their characters, their speech, and their manner. You will also want to consider how each of the characters is perceived by the other characters in the play. It will be particularly useful to examine their exchange in act 2 of the play. How do the characters interact with each other and what does this reveal to us about them?

2. **Children in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *The Rose Tattoo***: Both plays employ children throughout the play. What function do they serve and why is this significant?

   Consider all instances where children appear in these plays. What are the children doing when they make an appearance? Do they engage with the main characters in any way or are they primarily flat characters? Consider how the appearance of children is in harmony with the thematic concerns of the play. Does the presence of the children give us any insight into the main characters of these plays? Consider if the children hold any symbolic value. What might the children represent?

3. **The film and the play**: Compare and contrast the play with a film version or compare and contrast multiple film or television adaptations.

   The best-known film version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is the 1958 version, which featured Burl Ives as Big Daddy. Why do you think that this is the most well-known adaptation of the play? Is it true to Williams's own vision of the themes and characters? If not, what is different and how does this impact the way we interpret and react to the play?

   If you choose to compare and contrast multiple film or television adaptations, you will need to note similarities in the different versions. What do they share in common and why is this important? Why do you believe that all of the versions treated this element or these elements in the same way? You will also need to note variations in the versions and explain why these differences are significant. Were the changes due to structural concerns or concerns with the formal elements of the play? Or were they dictated by social constraints such as censorship? How do these variations, and their causes, change our interpretation of the play? If you locate changes that are due to social constraints, you might choose to organize your essay around an exploration of this topic, comparing its impact on this play to its impact on other Williams plays or examples of censorship in other works of literature.

4. **Brick and Blanche from *A Streetcar Named Desire***: Compare and contrast these two characters.

   Brick and Blanche are both troubled characters, plagued by events of the past. First you will need to explain what evidence we have to support the claim that Brick and Blanche are troubled characters, plagued by events of the past. What do we know about them and their past? How are these events revealed to us in the texts? How are the events similar? What impact do they have on Brick and Blanche? You will want to explain how each character responds to these events. Compare Brick's alcoholism and his search for the click that will bring him peace to Blanche's alcoholism and the polka that is followed by a gunshot. Are either of the characters able to surmount the problems associated with their tragic histories? Also, how does the theme of mendacity apply to each character?

5. **The women of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof***: Compare and contrast the female characters in the play.

   Although the female characters in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* are usually at odds, they share much in common. Consider the similarities between Maggie, Mae, and Big Mama. What are their roles in the family? What are
their motivations? How are they impacted by their relationships with their husbands? You may also want to consider Brick and Big Daddy's likening of Mae and Maggie to cats on a hot tin roof. Does this characterization also apply to Big Mama?

Further Information


